

Safety Tips: Through the Years

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Cars and travel are American classics, and nobody wants to relinquish mobility, regardless of age. Older drivers have decades of safe driving experience behind them, but the aging process may bring about a gradual decline in vision, hearing, and/or the ability to react quickly to abrupt changes in driving conditions. We all age, and while some of us may not like to think about it, it's inevitable. To maintain independence as traffic becomes heavier, speedier, and more congested, it may be helpful for seniors to take a refresher course in driving safety procedures. Various states even offer credits for safe driving courses taken. If you are an older driver, here are some things to be aware of that may affect your driving, as well as tips to help you remain safe:



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Vision Changes. Difficulty reading street signs or seeing lane markings, other vehicles, and pedestrians are all signs of vision problems. Night blindness and bright lights can also be problematic. If these situations give you trouble, try the following:

- If you are sensitive to light, ask your optometrist if there are treatments available. Avoid driving during darker hours, never wear sunglasses at night, and choose clear glass over tinted windows in your vehicle.
- Increase brightness on the dash display panels, and make sure your windshield, headlights, and mirrors are clean.
- Your posture should allow you to see at least ten feet ahead of your car. Use cushions to elevate yourself if necessary.

• Those age 60 and up should visit the optometrist once a year to test for glaucoma, cataracts, and other vision changes or impairments. Make sure your prescription glasses are up-to-date. Avoid wearing old prescription glasses or glasses with sidepieces that block peripheral vision, especially when driving.

Physical Mobility? If you have trouble maneuvering the foot pedals, suffer from joint pain, and/or are physically inactive, you may have problems performing the body motions necessary for driving safely. For help with these and other physical conditions that can hinder driving, consider the following:

- Consult your doctor about an exercise program that is right for you. A daily walk could be of great benefit.
- Drive automatic cars to reduce the need for excessive pedal manipulation. Occupational therapists and certified driving rehabilitation specialists can often prescribe special pedals and other devices designed for greater mobility.
- If you have hearing loss, make sure that noise inside your car is kept to a minimum. Watch for emergency vehicles, since you may not hear the sirens. Be aware that some people who wear hearing aids find that wind from open windows affects the aids' performance.
- Avoid injury in the event of an accident by keeping at least ten inches between yourself and airbag panels. And of course, always wear your seatbelt.

Stay Sharp! If you find traffic situations confusing, feel a lack of confidence, take medications that make you drowsy, or experience dizziness, you may find the following to be helpful:

- Drive only in familiar territory, drive during the day, and in non-rush hour traffic.
- Leave a four second space between your car and the one in front of you. Test this distance with the following technique: when you are approaching a road sign, count from the time the car ahead of you reaches the sign until the time you do.
- Look left and right at all intersections, not just straight ahead. As you are driving, repeatedly scan the road so that you will be prepared for what lies ahead.

Talk with your doctor if you have been experiencing difficulty when driving. Certain medications can cause side effects that interfere with your driving; your doctor may be able to ease these by adjusting or changing your medicines. In addition, consider refreshing your driving skills through a mature driving program. Taking these simple steps will help to ensure road trips and daily jaunts remain safe and fun for years to come.

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